Hillbilly Jan 27 1962
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Lant Rader Slaven

The Remarkable Governor Spotswood

There was never anybody like the dashing young Alexander Spotswood and few have told his story as well as a young West Virginia professor by the name of John A. Caruso. He has told it in his new book "The Appalachian Frontier: America's First Surge Westward." This page whets your appetite for Caruso with a bit from his book. All students of West Virginia history will want a copy of this magnificent book by a living West Virginian.

Such a man as Spotswood was naturally curious about the country beyond the mountains, which Virginia claimed by right of her ancient charter. Moreover, he had learned, perhaps from the surveyor Colonel William Byrd, that the French had taken possession of the Great Lakes region, where they carried on a lucrative fur trade, and had established themselves at Kaskaskia and on the lower Mississippi.

Possessed of a robust and "restless spirit only slightly concealed under an air of dignity," Spotswood resolved to see things for himself. His military experience complemented his adventurous temperament. He had been wounded at Blenheim, had fought at Malplaquet, and had risen at the age of twenty-eight to the rank of quartermaster-general.

Gentlemen and Servants

In August 1716 Spotswood assembled at Germanna two companies of rangers and a small group of mounted "gentlemen" with their servants and Indian guides. The expedition was to assume the form of an exploratory picnic. The gentlemen had abundant provisions, which included several cases of Virginia wine—both white and red—Irish usquebaugh, brandy, stout, two kinds of rum, champagne, cherry punch and cider. The blast of a trumpet early on the morning of August 30 called them to their horses.

The governor, dressed in green velvet riding clothes, Russian leather boots and a hat bedecked with a brilliant plume, led his companions along the three more days, crossing small streams, killing rattlesnakes and suffering such discomfort as that of being stung by hornets, until they halted on one of the loftiest peaks of the mountains.

The occasion called for proper celebration. Spotswood delivered an eloquent address and drank to the health of the King and that of the royal family; then he led his companions down the western slope of the peak. The descent proved hazardous. The little streams they followed led to precipices which often frightened and stalled their horses. But their perseverence was eventually rewarded; they came on a smiling valley watered by a clear and beautiful river which Spotswood called the Euphrates—a name which later yielded to that of Shenandoah. Crossing the river, they buried in its bank a bottle which contained a paper claiming the region for their King, George I.

Wild Turkeys and Deer

The valley abounded with wild turkeys and deer and cucumbers and currants and grapes. On these they feasted and then, assembling and loading their guns, drank to the health of the King in champagne, and fired a volley; drank to the Princess in Burgundy, and fired a volley; drank to the royal family in claret, and fired a volley; drank to the governor, and fired a volley. In this convivial mood the gentlemen turned their horses homeward, leaving some of the rangers to continue west to the Warriors' Path where Iroquois often hunt-

Later Spotswood glowingly described "World's End," as he called the country he had visited. To encourage settlement in the western valley, he pictured it as an agricultural paradise abounding with health-restoring mineral springs. He also presented to each of the gentlemen who had accompanied him a miniature golden horseshoe on which was inscribed Sic Juvat Transcendere Montes. It is pleasurable to cross the mountains—and to have relived the expedition with the adventurous governor and his Knights of the Golden Horseshoe.

Before long Spotswood had acquired immense estates for himself and his friends. His appetite for property increased with every acre he secured. In 1720 he influenced the Virginia assembly to pass an act which divided the Piedmont of Virginia into two counties, Brunswick and Spotsylvania, where the landowners enjoyed religious toleration and exemption from taxes or quitrents for a period of ten years. Spotswood and his associates put this act into operation despite the refusal of the Crown to approve it unless land grants were limited to 1,000 acres.

THE PLATE AND THE MAN

Robert Cavelier, Sieur de

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The governor, dressed in green velvet riding clothes, fringed leather boots and a hat bedecked with a brilliant plume, led his companions along the banks of the Rapidan toward its source. Five days later they reached the Blue Ridge Mountains. By then clambering for three more days, crossing small streams, killing rattlesnakes and suffering such discomfort as that of being stung by hornets, until they halted on one of the loftiest peaks of the mountains.

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Robert Cavelier, Sieur de La Salle, the man who first explored West Virginia's Ohio